PIÑON BOARDING SCHOOL (Piñon Community School)
Navajo Route 41 North of Navajo Route 4
Piñon
Navajo County
Arizona

HABS No. AZ-162

HABS
ARIZ
9-PIN,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94107

HABS
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PIÑON BOARDING SCHOOL
(Piñon Community School)

HABS No. AZ-162

Location:

Navajo Route 41 North of Navajo Route 4
Piñon
Navajo County
Arizona

USGS Piñon Quadrangle (7.5)
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
12.569860. 3995275

Present Owner:

Piñon Community School Board
P.O. Box 159
Piñon, Arizona 86510

Present Occupant:

Piñon Community School

Present Use:

Building 316 is a dormitory. Building 301, 302, and 307 are abandoned.

Significance:

Established in 1932 as a day school, the Piñon Boarding School's original Pueblo Revival sandstone buildings date back to 1935. These buildings were built during the administration of John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, who launched a large fast-track construction campaign to provide schools for the Navajo Reservation.

The Piñon Boarding School was one of 47 schools on the Navajo reservation funded by a Public Works Administration grant of $1.5 million. It was among the first schools built and had one of the four largest classroom buildings.

PART I. DESCRIPTION

The original 1935 Pueblo Revival buildings were constructed of native Dakota sandstone cut, dressed, and laid by Navajo workers employed by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Some of the roofs are flat with overhangs, while others are flat with parapets. Architectural details include wood lintels, exposed wood vigas and large wood canales (scuppers).

The buildings of interest are listed below:

BLDG. NO.	DATE	USE	STYLE/TYPE	STATUS
301[1]	1935	Classroom/Admin.	Pueblo Revival - parapet	Abandoned. Scheduled for demolition.
302[2]	1935	Staff Quarters	PR - parapet	Abandoned. Scheduled for demolition.
305	1935	Pumphouse	PR	Demolished.
307[4]	1935	Residence	PR - parapet and overhang	Abandoned.
316[3]	1935	Dormitory	PR - overhang	To be restored.

[1] See HABS No. AZ-162-A
[2] See HABS No. AZ-162-B
[3] See HABS No. AZ-162-C
[4] See HABS No. AZ-162-D

PART II. HISTORY

Architecture as Historical Record

The 1935 stone buildings at Piñon Boarding School present a historically interesting duality of erchitectural character. Being of Pueblo Revival Style, the buildings evoke nostalgia of the rugged Old West, yet possess a kinship with refined stone halls on Ivy League campuses of the East.

While the style of the buildings is a valuable part of American architectural heritage, the buildings themselves become even more significant historically es they represent layers of American and Navajo history. Their very existence is e testament to the reversel of a culturally destructive government policy and a commitment to preserve the rich Navajo heritage.

Assimilation through Education

From 1860 to 1928, the United States government executed a strategic policy of systematic assimilation of all Native Americans. In stark contrast to its purpose today, the 8ureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) set out to undermine Indian culture by destroying the power of chiefs, splintering tribal cohesiveness and relations, end breaking up the cultural fabric -- primarily through education. This was the mission of boarding schools. In 1881, Indian Commissioner Hiram Price, explained the role of boarding schools in his Annual Report:

> "The agency boarding school is the object lesson for the reservation. The new method of thought and life exemplified, while being wrought into pupils, are watched by those outside. Parents visit the school, and the pupils take back into their homes new habits and ideas gained in the School room, sewing room, kitchen, and farm."

Boarding schools, whether on or off the reservation, separated the children from their families and culture. Since most Indians could not see the value of formal education, attendance was low. As a result, Congress passed a law in 1887 that made it mandatory for Indian children to attend school. In 1890, government agents actually seized Indian children in the southwest end sent them to school in Grand Junction, Colorado -- far away from their homes and families. This created resentment toward the government and further demoralized the Indian people.

Between 1900 and 1925, more boarding schools were opened on the reservation, making them more accessible. Attendance improved as the Indians became more awere of the outslde world, thus the need for formal education. But es interest in ettending increased, conditions at the schools worsened. The buildings were dilapidated, overcrowded and poorly suited for instruction. Many had been abandoned military buildings and dormitories were typically old barracks. As a result of poor diets and sanitation, the children suffered from a variety of illnesses, with tuberculosis and trachoma being full-blown epidemics.

The curriculum for the boarding schools was a combination of classroom work and vocational training to prepare the student to earn a living in white society. The "vocetional training" conveniently coincided with the labor required to keep the school operating. In 1922, "The Course of Study for United States Indian Schools" states:

> "In our Indian schools a large amount of productive work is necessary. They could not possibly maintain on the amounts appropriated by Congress for their support were it not for the fact that students are required to do washing, ironing, baking, cooking, sewing, to care for the dairy, farm, garden, grounds, buildings, etc. -- an emount of labor that has in aggregate a very appreciable monetary value. The Plan requires the Indian student to work half a day and to attend classroom exercises during the other half."

The reprehensible conditions of Indian boarding schools finally received attention in 1928 with the release of a report entitled The Problem of Indian Administration. The study had been compiled by experts in areas such as education, health, and administration. The Meriam Report, as it was also called, was a comprehensive condemnation of the effectiveness of the BIA education system and its advancement of Indian peoples. The report cited the government's essimilation policy and lack of funding as the primary causes for the failure.

By August 1930, the Hoover administration had initiated some of the reforms suggested by the Meriam Report including a three-fold policy:

1. Development of community day schools.
2. Allowing Indian children to attend public schools.
3. Phasing out boarding schools.

The Crash of 1929 slowed progress, but by 1932 a few day schools had been built, reducing enrollment in boarding schools -- which had adjusted their curricula to emphasize instruction rather than labor.

John Collier

Some of these reforms were to be continued in the years to follow by an Indian rights advocate and reformer by the name of John Collier. Mr. Collier was from Georgia and was educated at Columbia University as well as the Collége de France. He had pursued a career in social work with a particular interest in new immigrants. While in New York City he had also been ective in various reform movements.

In 1920, Collier visited the Taos Pueblo in New Mexico where he saw the impressive Christmas rituals. It was here that he was introduced to the Pueblo Indian social structure which was an example of what he had tried to achieve with immigrants in his social work: e group of people living together and making decisions communally. This was an experience that would change the course of Collier's life and, ultimately, the interaction between the federal government and Native Americans, especially the Navajo. After touring the Navajo reservation in 1922, Collier wrote:

"The Navajos are the Indian tribe within the United States who have kept the prehistorical cultural system most nearly unchanged and unweakened."

Over the next ten years, Collier became an influential spokesman for Native Americans, fighting to protect their land, water, and oil rights, and teaching the Indians to mobilize in defense of their tribal interests.

Plight of The Navajo Nation

By 1930, the Navajo Nation, whose people had always shown great resiliency to hardship, had fallen on difficult times that were only to become worse. The tribe's immense number of sheep and goats, estimated at 1.3 million head, was at least twice what their range land could sustain. This estimate did not include the 37,000 cattle and 80,000 horses that also grazed on the reservation. The excessive number of livestock was destroying the Navajo land by overgrazing and erosion. To make matters worse, the Depression had crippled the US economy, driving down wool and sheep prices and decreasing demand. This left more sheep on the range which exacerbated the problem.

Consequently, the Navajo economy was already depressed when the severe winter of 1931 struck. Heavy snowfall buried the already sparse grazing lands and temperatures dropped to -20°. White traders extended credit and helped the Indians as much as they could, but the bitter winter had brought too much suffering. George Hubbell, operating the trading post across the road from the site of the Piñon school, wrote in January 1932:

"I feel sorry for these people. The government [sent] up about 80 bags of flour which lasted one day and now every day from 10 to 30 come in wanting rations, nearly all of them afoot, men, women, and children; many of them stay all night and of course I have to feed them....It is indeed piteful, and then they have to go back home without any food, lagging #10 shoes, underware and a shirt.

The last truck from the Cannon [Keams Canyon?] brought shoes, underware and blankets and 6 cc of baking powder no flour or sugar. My goodness, of course I keep out of the mess but I see everything and cannot help but wonder what is to be done."

That spring, the range was littered with hundreds of thousands of dead animals. In desperation, the Navajo would pull wool off the sheep carcasses and sell it for whatever the trader would pay. With the temperatures of summer, every trading post was blanketed in the stench of rotten wool - a grim reminder of the long suffering of the Navajo people.

The New Deal

Amid the devastation, the 1932 Presidential election brought a glimmer of hope. Franklin D. Roosevelt was ushered into the White House with his economic package, the New Deal, which promised to pull the nation out of the Depression. As the early months of Roosevelt's administration unfolded, he exhibited a willingness to appoint unlikely candidates, and those with unconventional ideas.

Such was the appointment of Harold Ickes to Secretary of the Interior. Considered a long shot without much experience in politics in the West, Ickes was sympathetic to the plight of the Navajos. Roosevelt met with Ickes and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Robinson regarding the appointment of Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Ickes, wanting reform, backed John Collier because of his yeers of experience fighting for Indian causes. Robinson backed Edgar Merritt who represented the politics of assimilation instituted by past administrations. Roosevelt had also received many letters in opposition to Merritt. Collier, therefore, was selected and sworn in as Commissioner on April 21, 1933.

As Commissioner, Collier was in a position to implement the reforms dictated by his fresh new philosophies toward Indian affairs, and the suffering of the Navajos was the most critical issue to address. In fact, New Deal funds poured into the reservation to relieve the severe plight of the people, and because Collier and the government saw the Navajo as a unique opportunity. As Collier had observed in 1922, the Navajo heritage had survived nearly unchanged despite the policy of assimilation. Given that the new administration's philosophy toward Indian education was to preserve Indian heritage and promote self-government, the Navajos seemed ideal for achieving these goals. They were relatively isolated from white society end its ever-increasing influence, and their rich heritage and culture was intact. The Navajo reservation was viewed as a pilot project where ideas could be tested before being implemented on other reservations.

Education and Heritage

Collier's philosophy on education was that children should not be isolated in boarding schools, away from their parents and culture. He believed they should attend day schools where they could be educated while maintaining direct contact with their heritage by living at home. Philosophically, this was admirable, but was somewhat impractical on the Navajo reservation. Being the largest tribe on the largest reservation in the country, Navajo families were often far from schools or even roads, most of which were in poor condition and impassable during inclement weather.

This was only one of a number of objections to Collier's proposed changes and philosophies. There were debates over the curriculum and who should teach. Collier was in favor of young tribesmen teaching subjects pertinent to Indian life. Others argued that Indian children should be taught the "three R's" by a qualified white teacher -- just as white children were taught. Many critics pointed out that the mission schools were graduating students that scored as well or better than the national everage on achievement tests. Government school students, on the other hand, scored much lower than average.

Even the day school concept was challenged by Navajo leaders who had attended the old boarding schools where military discipline, absolute attention, harsh punishment, and contempt for Indian life prevailed. Since their education was not fun, they could not understand how children could learn in the casual, pleasant atmosphere of a day school.

All of the debate eventually molded the day school concept into e final form. The day schools would offer four grades instructed by qualified (usually white) teechers who would teach both white end Indian subject matter with an emphasis on Navajo problems and government programs. Teachers were also encouraged to be extension workers, visiting students' homes, meeting parents, and involving the community in school activities.

In 1934, a Public Works Administration (PWA) grant of $1.5 million funded a massive construction campaign to build forty-seven day schools on the Navajo reservation. Some, such as the school at Piñon, were both boarding end day schools, providing sleeping quarters for students who were far from home.

A New York City architectural firm, Mayers, Murray and Phillip, designed the new schools. In keeping with Collier's philosophies, the architecture was sensitive to Indian culture, but provided facilities similar to those of white schools. Since the schools were on a fast-track construction schedule, they were quickly located at trading posts where public access was maximized and access to water was ensured. The designs were simple and functional, built of native materials, thus easily constructed by unskilled Indian workers employed by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The new schools reflected Collier's vision of community living by providing residents access to facilities such as e kitchen, free water for laundry and showers, and e workshop for vocational needs.

Statistics gleaned from the book The Navajos and the New Deal prompt some conclusions about the historic details of Piñon and its school. Author Donald Parman mentions that although Collier's building campaign was on a fast-track schedule, only three schools were completed by 1935. Since the school buildings at Piñon were completed in 1935, this makes it one of the first three schools built. He also writes that trading posts doing at least $60,000 in annual trade were selected as sites of two-classroom schools. Since Piñon's classroom building was originelly four (possibly five) classrooms one can surmise that the Hubbell trading post must have been very prosperous. In a footnote, Parman addresses the size of classroom buildings, stating that of the four largest, three had four classrooms and one had eight. Piñon, therefore, had one of the four largest classroom buildings of the 47 schools built.

From their siting at a reservation trading post to the native materials used in their Pueblo Revival architecture, the buildings recall a time when the United States government made a concentrated effort to correct the cultural destruction caused by the policy of assimilation that wes perpetrated on Native Americans for nearly 70 years. These buildings served to educate Navajo children and nurture their heritage while providing the adult community with essential services that would improve the Navajo quality of life.

The School at Piñon

Piñon Day School, the precursor of Piñon Boarding School, was originally established in 1932, and may have been one of the day schools established by the Hoover administration in response to the Meriam Report. The PWA buildings were built in 1935 and include a classroom building (301), staff quarters (302), e residence (307), a boys dormitory (south wing 316), and its mirror image girls dormitory (north wing 316). [Figs. 1,2, Photo 3] With the new buildings, the school at Piñon became a boarding school, but also served as e community center as Collier envisioned. The single-story buildings are constructed of Dakota sandstone with wood vigas, canales, and lintels typical of the Pueblo Revival Style. (Details are discussed more thoroughly in each building's respective HABS documentation.)

Changes: Past and Future

The dormitories are the only buildings that received any major alteration over the years. In 1956 the two buildings were joined by a concrete block addition containing toilet and shower facilities, a mechanical room, end a staff apartment. All other buildings have remained unaltered. The classroom building (301) and the residence (307) have been abandoned. The staff quarters (302) was also abandoned after a death occurred in the north living quarters some years ago. Navajo beliefs regarding the dead require the building to be abandoned. It is considered a "chinde" building. (See the documentation of Building 302 for more details.)

A new complex of school buildings has been designed for the site*, requiring the demolition of the classroom building (301), and the staff quarters (302). [Fig. 3, Photos 1,2] The middle 1956 addition of the dormitory building (316) will also be demolished, returning the two 1935 dormitories to freestanding buildings as they were originally built. [Figs. 2,3] The boys dormitory (south wing 316), will be restored and assigned a different use. The girls dormitory (north wing 316) is being relinquished to the Navajo tribe and its fate is unknown.

*Architect: Lescher and Mahoney/DLR Group; Phoenix, AZ

PART III. SOURCES

Parman, Donald L. The Navajos and the New Deal
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976

Threinen, Ellen. 1981. The Navajos and the BIA: A Study of Government Buildings on the Navajo Reservation. American Indian Engineering, Inc./Bureau of Indian Affairs

Other possible sources:

Indians at Work. Issues published from 1934 - 1936.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This survey is a mitigative recording required by a Memorandum of Agreement signed by the following parties:

Phyllis Badoni, Executive Director
Piñon Community School Board

Tom Tippeconnic, Assistant Area Director
Navajo Area Office, Navajo Area BIA

Jim Garrison
Arizona State Historic Preservation Office

Alan Downer, Historic Preservation Officer
Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department

Robert Bush, Executive Director
Advising Council on Historic Preservation

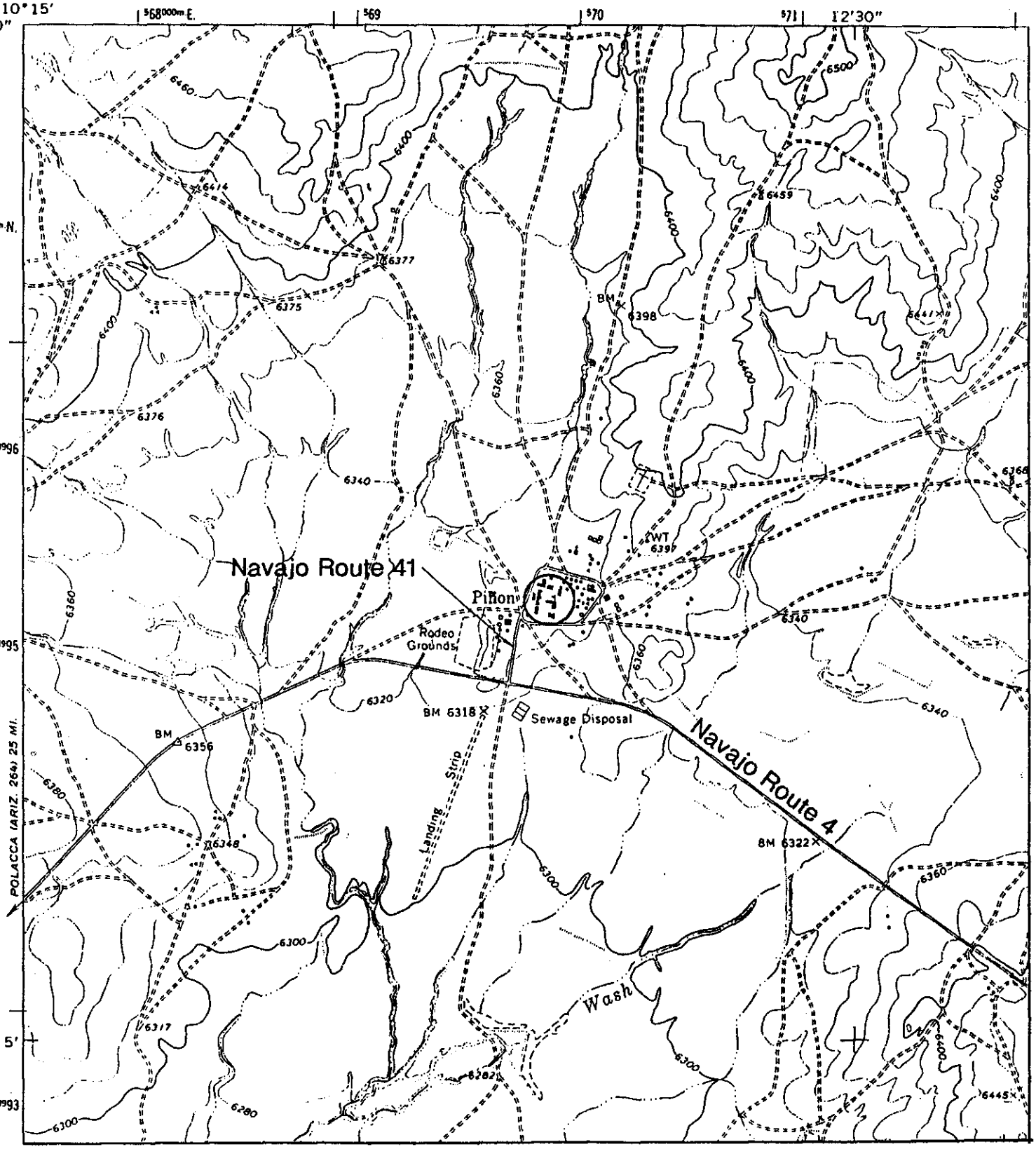
The survey documentation was completed in July 1993 by Lescher and Mahoney/DLR Group with the cooperation of the following:

Piñon Community School Board
Bureau of Indian Affairs - Gallup Office
Bureau of Indian Affairs - Albuquerque Office
Arizona State Historic Preservation Office
Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department
David Sloan and Associates, Architects

Prepared by: Brett A. Hobza
Affiliation: Lescher and Mahoney/DLR Group, Architects Phoenix, Arizona
Date: July 1993

3956 III NE
(AT SPRING)

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



SITE LOCATION MAP

Piñon Boarding School Piñon, AZ

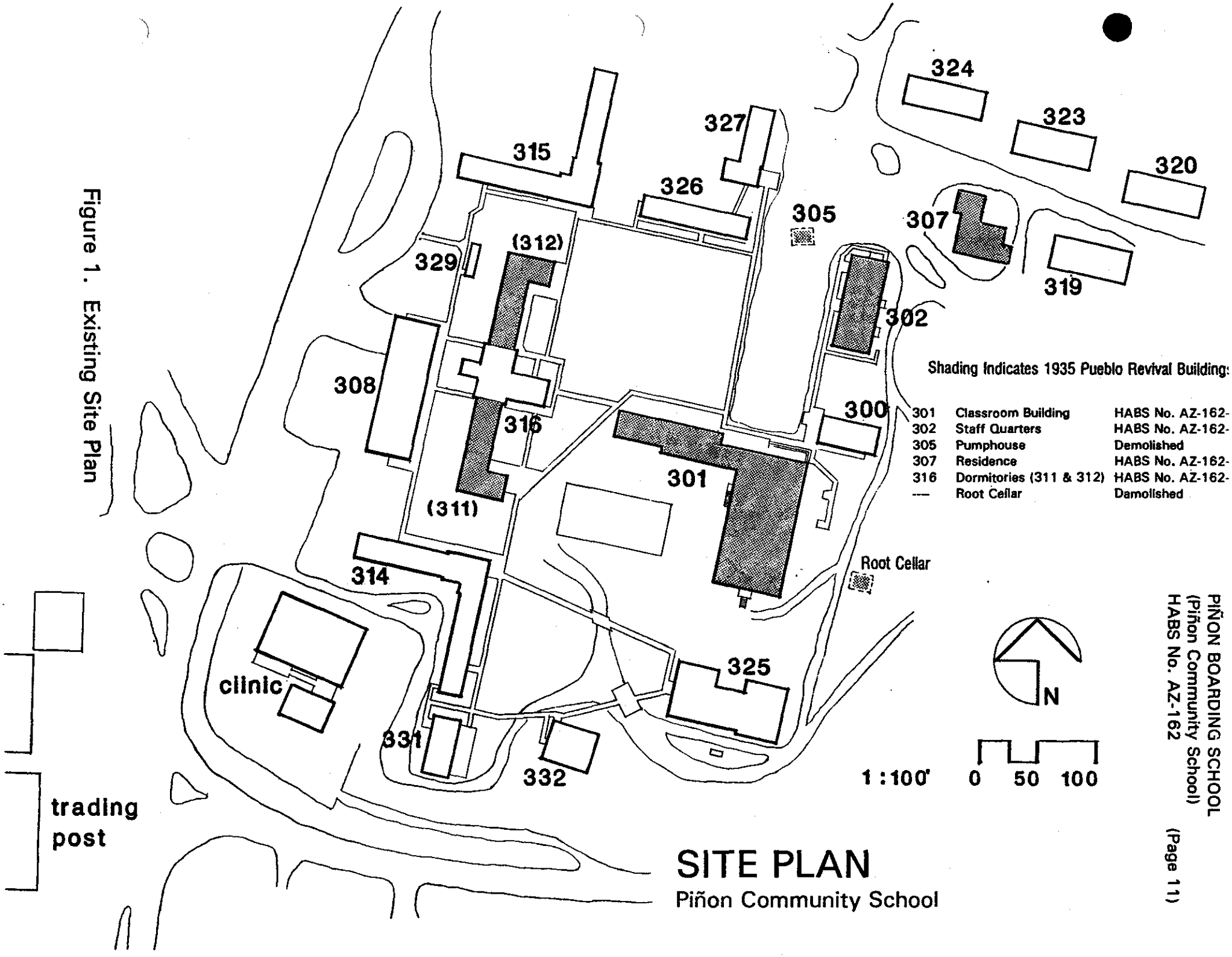


Figure 1. Existing Site Plan

PIÑON BOARDING SCHOOL
(Piñon Community School)
HABS No. AZ-162

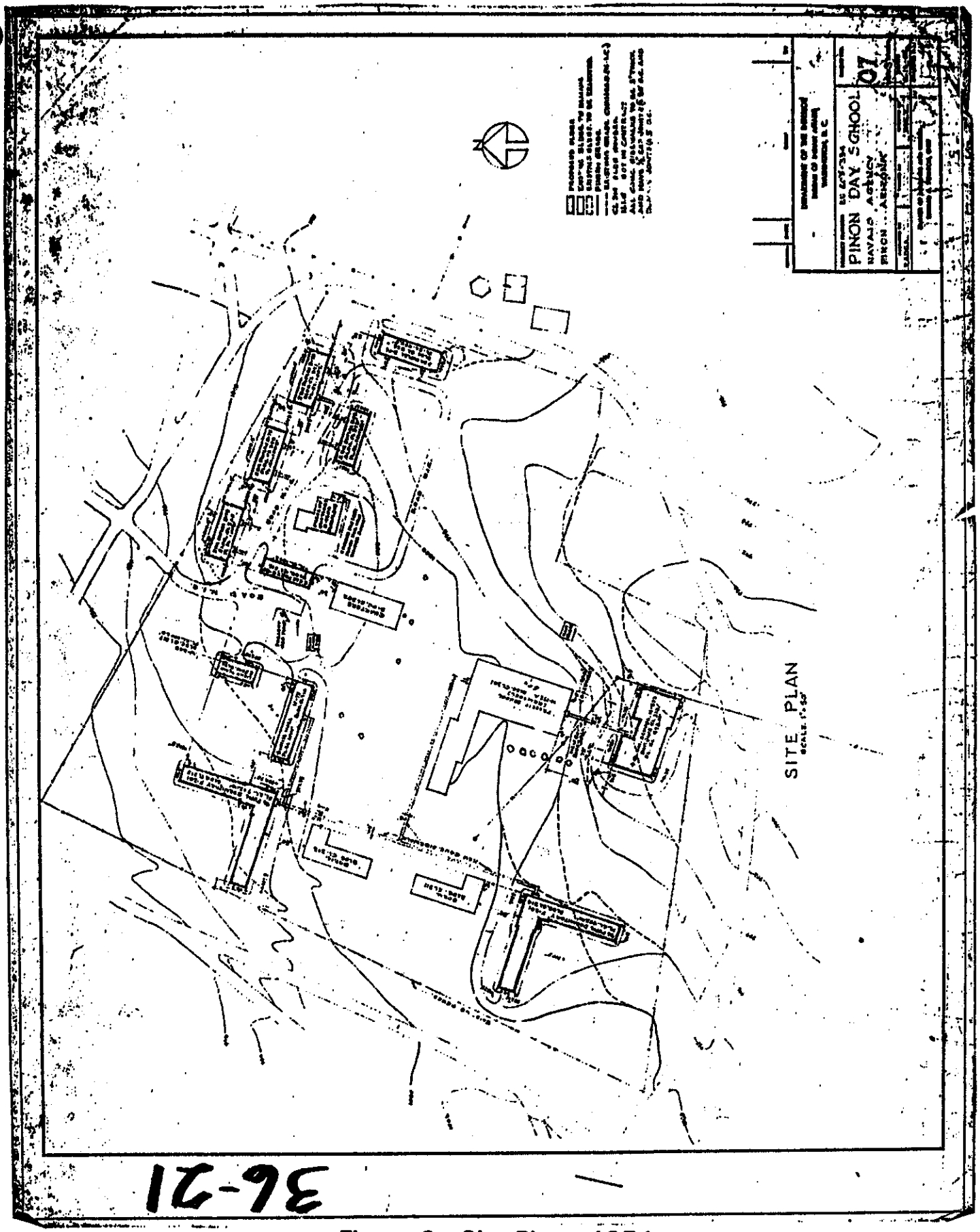


Figure 2. Site Plan - 1954

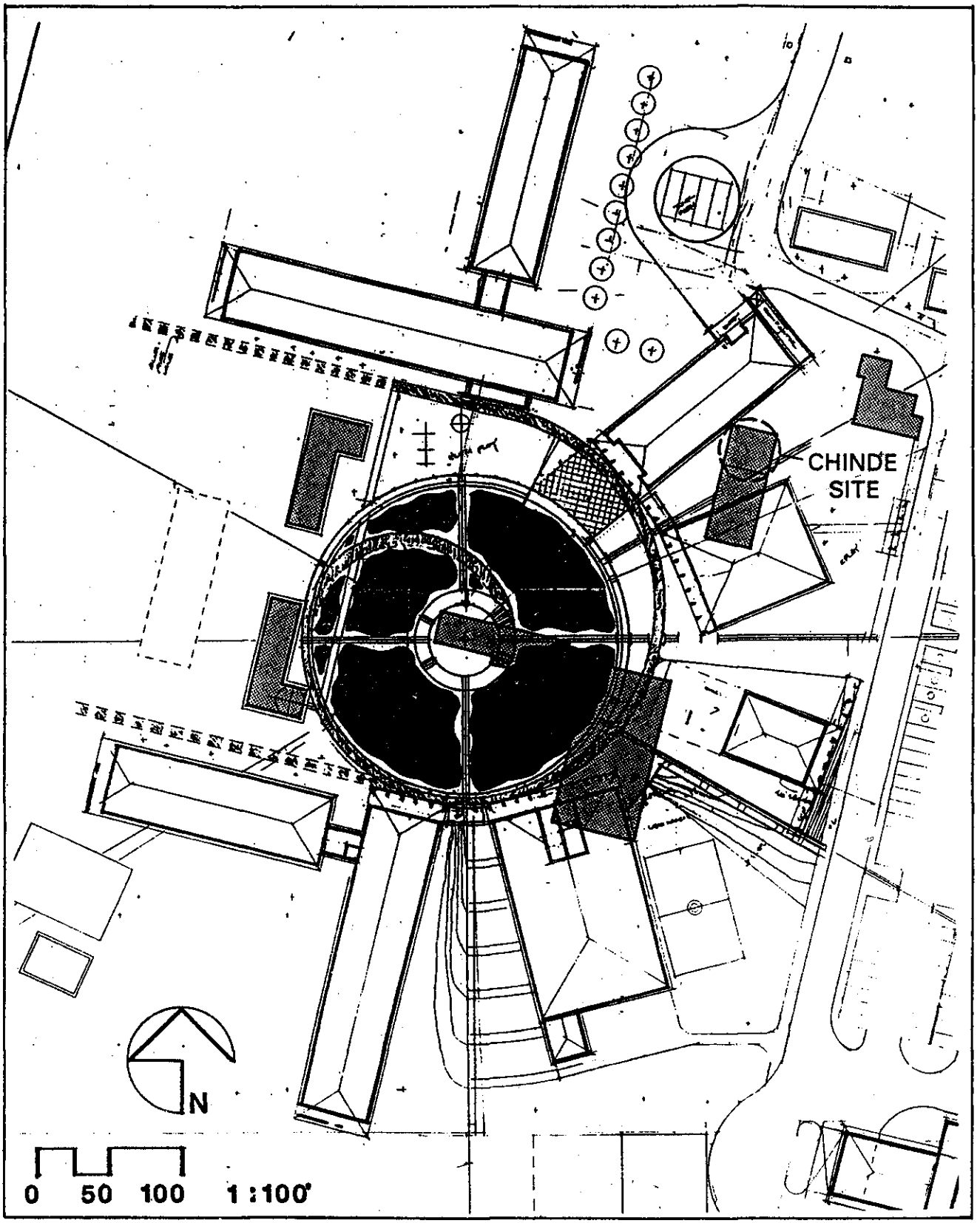


Figure 3. Site Plan - New Complex

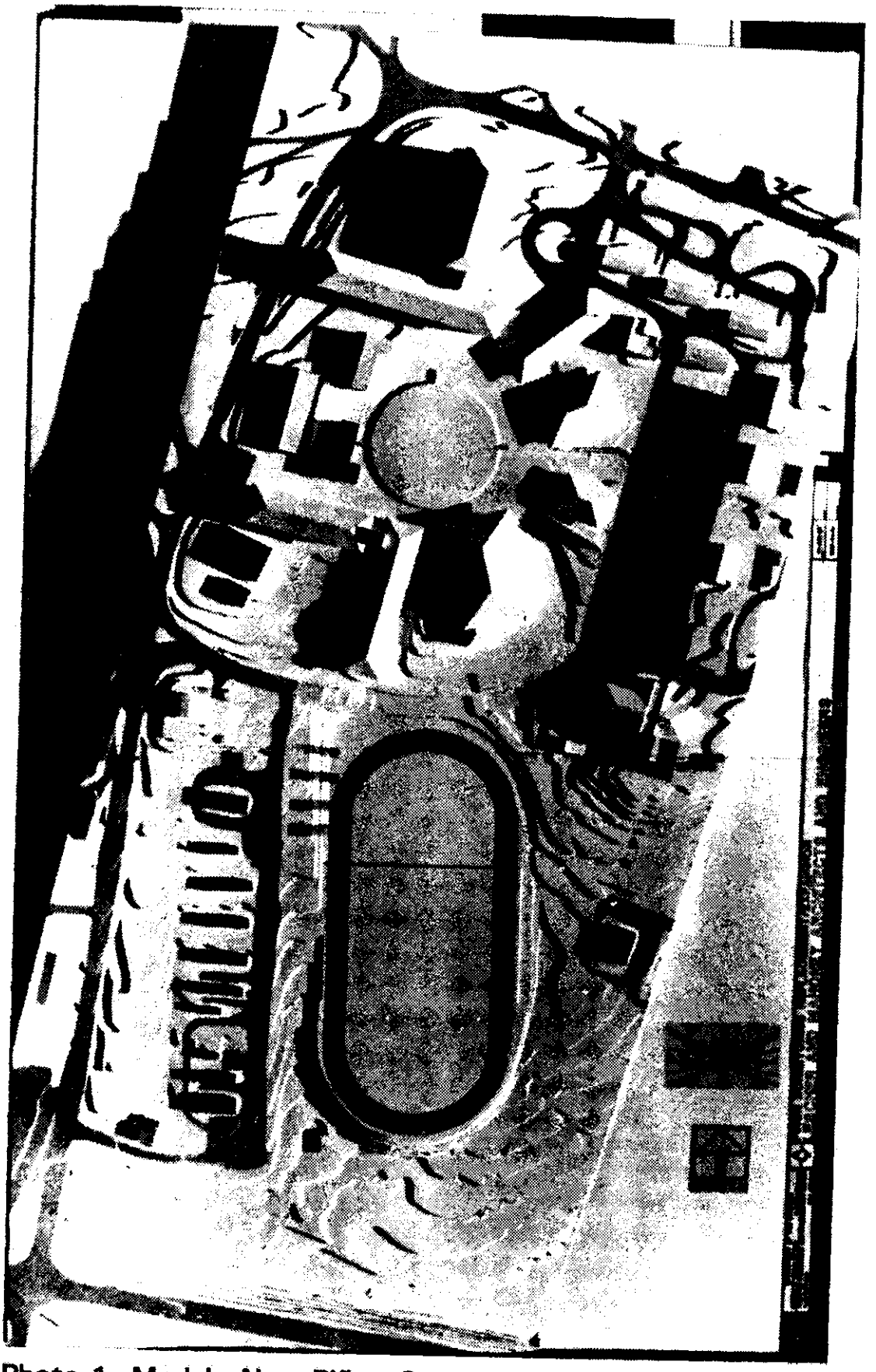


Photo 1. Model - New Piñon Community School

Photo 2. Model - New Piñon Community School

1 : 100' 0 50 100

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Photo 3. Aerial View - Existing Piñon Community School

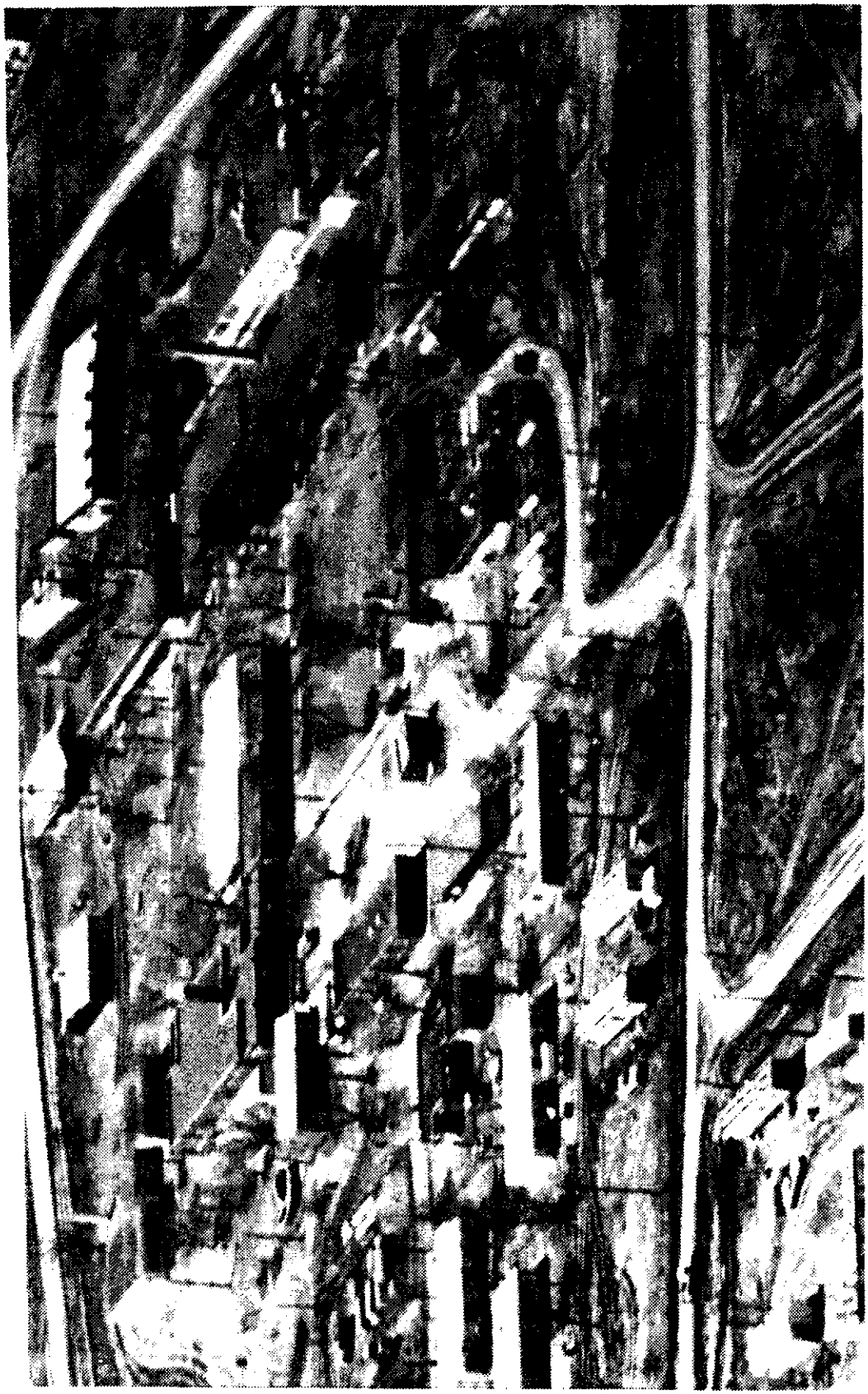

Photo 4. Aerial View from North

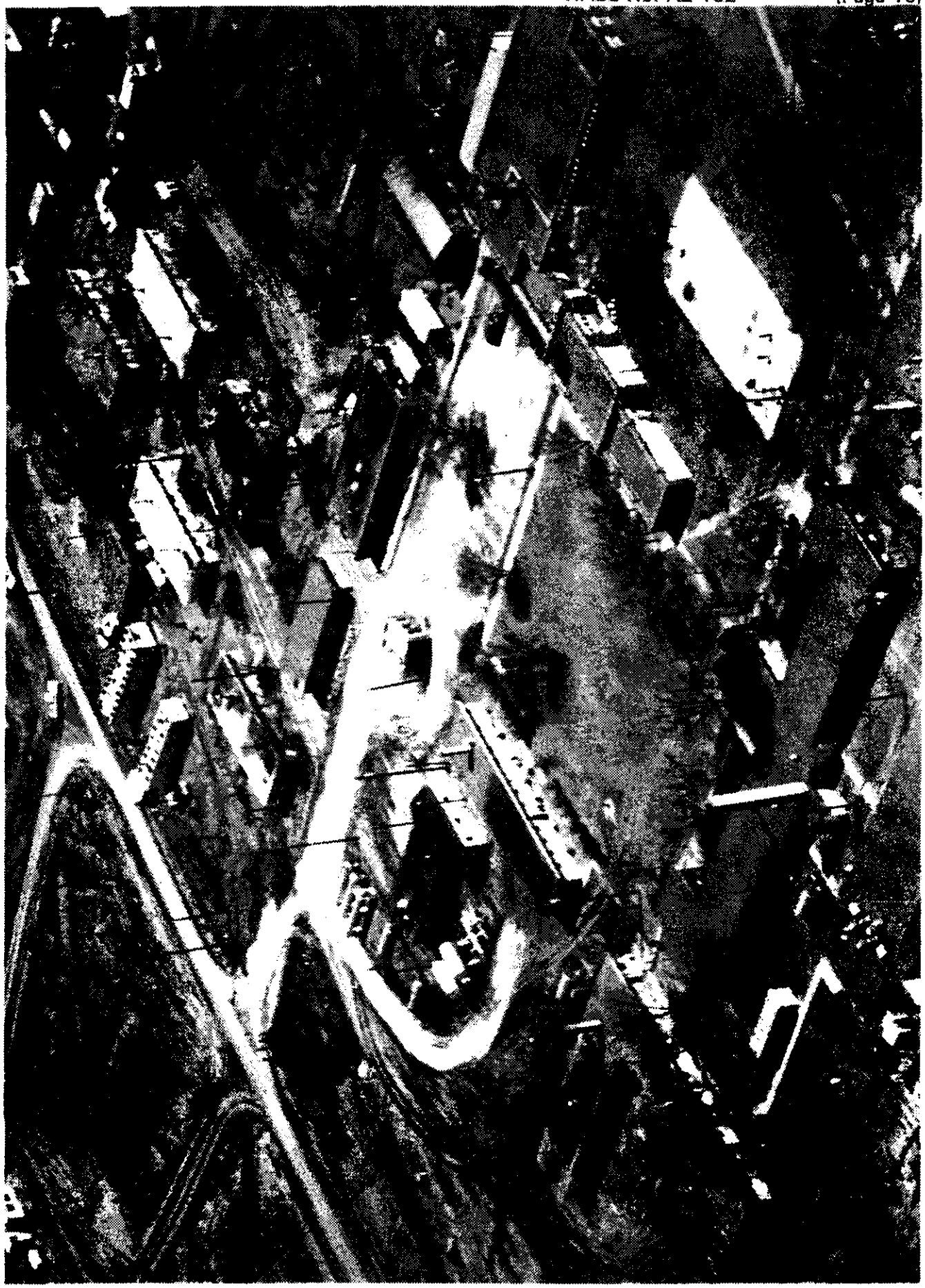

Photo 5. Aerial View from West

SITE LOCATION MAP — Photocopy of U.S. Geological Survey map, Piñon Quadrangle, Arizona-Navajo County.
SITE LOCATION MAP

FIGURE 1 — Photocopy of drewing (original drawing located et Lescher and Mahoney/DLR Group, Phoenix Office). Brett A. Hobza, Delineator. June 1993.
EXISTING SITE PLAN, PIÑON COMMUNITY SCHOOL, 1993.

FIGURE 2 — Photocopy of civil engineering drewing (originel drawing located at Nevajo Area Bureeu of Indien Affairs, Window Rock, Arizona).
SITE PLAN OF PIÑON DAY SCHOOL, 1954. SHEET 07.

FIGURE 3 — Photocopy of drewing (original drawing located at Lescher and Mahoney/DLR Group, Phoenix Office). Tim D. Smith, Delineator. June 1993.
SITE PLAN OF NEW PIÑON COMMUNITY SCHOOL WITH 1935 BUILDINGS SUPERIMPOSED.

PHOTO 1 — Photocopy of photograph (original print located at Lescher and Mahoney/DLR Group, Phoenix Office). Tim D. Smith, Photogrepher. July 1993.
MODEL. AERIAL VIEW OF NEW PIÑON COMMUNITY SCHOOL. 1935 DORMITORY BUILDINGS ARE WEST OF CEREMONIAL CIRCLE. 1935 RESIDENCE IS NORTHEAST OF CEREMONIAL CIRCLE.

PHOTO 2 — Photocopy of photogreph (original print located at Lescher and Mahoney/DLR Group, Phoenix Office). Tim D. Smith, Photographer. July 1993.
MODEL. VIEW OF NEW PIÑON COMMUNITY SCHOOL, LOOKING WEST. 1935 DORMITORY BUILDINGS ON WEST SIDE OF CEREMONIAL CIRCLE. 1935 RESIDENCE TO NORTHEAST OF CEREMONIAL CIRCLE.

PHOTO 3 — Photocopy of aerial photograph (original print loceted at Lescher and Mehoney/DLR Group, Phoenix Office). Atherton Engineering, Phoenix, Photographer. Flown January 1993.
AERIAL VIEW OF PIÑON COMMUNITY SCHOOL, 1993, SHOWING ORIGINAL 1935 PIÑON BOARDING SCHOOL BUILDINGS.

PHOTO 4 — Photocopy of aerial photograph (original print located at Bureeu of Indian Affairs, Albuquerque Office). Photographer unknown. Date unknown.
AERIAL VIEW FROM NORTH OF PIÑON COMMUNITY SCHOOL.

PHOTO 5 — Photocopy of aerial photogreph (original print loceted at Bureeu of Indien Affairs, Albuquerque Office). Photogrepher unknown. Date unknown.
AERIAL VIEW FROM WEST OF PIÑON COMMUNITY SCHOOL.